THE JEWS

A Comedy in One Act
Written in 1749

and related correspondence

Characters

Michel Stich
Martin Krumm
A Traveler
Christoph, *his servant*
The Baron
A Young Lady, *his daughter*
Lisette

Scene 1

Michel Stich. Martin Krumm.

MARTIN KRUMM: You're an idiot, Michel Stich!

MICHEL STICH: You're an idiot, Martin Krumm!

MARTIN KRUMM: We may as well admit that we were both incredibly stupid. Killing one more wouldn't have made any difference!

MICHEL STICH: But how could we have gone about it more cleverly? Weren't we well disguised? wasn't the coachman on our side? was it our fault that Lady Luck thwarted our plans? If I've said it once, I've said it a hundred times: rotten luck! you can't even be a good criminal without it!

MARTIN KRUMM: Yes, you know, when I really think about it, it didn't even help us to avoid the noose for a few more days.

MICHEL STITCH: Oh, shut up about the noose! If all thieves were hanged, the gallows would have to stand a lot closer together. You only ever see one every two miles; and where there is one, it's usually empty. I think that the judges, just to be polite, will simply let them fade out of use. What are they good for, anyway? For nothing, except that, at the most, one of our kind, whenever he goes by, gives them a wink.

MARTIN KRUMM: Oh! I don't even do that! My father and my grandfather died on them, should I ask for something better? I'm not ashamed of my parents.

MICHEL STITCH: But those honest people will be ashamed of you. You haven't done enough by a long shot for people to begin to think of you as their right and proper son.

MARTIN KRUMM: Oh! so you think then that because of that our master should get off easy? And I certainly want to revenge myself too on that wretched stranger, who tore such a tasty morsel out of our mouths. He's really going to have to drop us his watch—Ha! See, there he comes now. Quick! Get out of here! I'll prove I'm a master at this!

MICHEL STITCH: But we have to go halves! halves!

Scene 2

Martin Krumm. The Traveler.

MARTIN KRUMM: I'll play dumb.—Your humble servant, sir. They call me Martin Krumm, and here, on this estate, I'd be the highly esteemed steward.

TRAVELER: And well I believe you, my friend. But have you seen my servant?

MARTIN KRUMM: At your service, sir, no. But I have had the honor of hearing many good things about your most excellent person. And so I rejoice in having the honor of enjoying the honor of your acquaintance. They say that yesterday evening, on his journey, you snatched our master from a very dangerous situation. And as I can do no other than rejoice in the good fortune of my master, I rejoice—

TRAVELER: I think I know what you want; you want to thank me for helping your master—

MARTIN KRUMM: Yes, quite right! just that!

TRAVELER: You're an honest man—

MARTIN KRUMM: That I am! And honesty is the best policy, I always say!

TRAVELER: It is no small pleasure for me that, because of such a small kindness, I have made so many upstanding people so obliged to me. Your gratitude is an unnecessary reward for what I did. The common love of mankind obliged me to it. It was my duty, and I would needs be content, if it had been seen for nothing other than that. You are all too kind, dear people, to thank me for that which, without doubt, you would have done for me just as eagerly, had I found myself in similar danger. Can I be of any further service to you, my friend?

MARTIN KRUMM: Oh, I don't want to burden you with service, sir. I have my servant, who has to wait on me whenever it's necessary. But—what I'd really like to know is, what really happened? Where was it? Were there many criminals? Did they actually want to kill our master, or did they just want to relieve him of his money? One would certainly have been better than the other.

TRAVELER: I'll briefly tell you the whole course of things. It was probably just an hour from here where the robbers attacked your master on a deserted road. I was traveling just that same road, and his frightened cries for help prompted me to ride upon them in all haste along with my servant.

MARTIN KRUMM: Oh my! my!

TRAVELER: I found him in an open carriage—

MARTIN KRUMM: Oh my! my!
TRAVELER: Two disguised fellows—
MARTIN KRUMM: Disguised? Oh my! my!
TRAVELER: Yes! They had already set upon him.
MARTIN KRUMM: Oh my! my!
TRAVELER: Whether they wanted to kill him, or just tie him up, to plunder him all the more thoroughly, I don't know.
MARTIN KRUMM: Oh my! my! Oh, they surely wanted to kill him, the godless people!
TRAVELER: That's just what I don't want to say for fear of accusing them of too much.
MARTIN KRUMM: Yes, yes, believe me, they wanted to kill him. I know, I know for a fact—
TRAVELER: How could you know that? But, so be it. As soon as the robbers saw me, they left their prey and ran head over heels into the nearby shrubbery. I got off a shot at one of them. But it was already too dark, and he was already too far away, so that I cannot be at all sure that I hit him.
MARTIN KRUMM: No, you didn't hit him;—
TRAVELER: How do you know that?
MARTIN KRUMM: I just mean, because it was already dark: and I hear that nobody can aim well in the dark.
TRAVELER: I cannot describe to you, how grateful your master was to me. A hundred times he called me his savior, and pressed me to return to his estate with him. I only wish that my circumstances permitted me to remain longer in the company of this pleasant man; as it is, however, I must set out again today—And for just that very reason, I'm looking for my servant.
MARTIN KRUMM: Oh, don't stay on my account! But pardon just one more thing—Yes! what was it that I wanted to ask? The robbers,—tell me now,—what did they really look like? Were they on foot? They had disguised themselves, but as what?
TRAVELER: Your master absolutely insists that they were Jews. It's true they had beards, but their speech was the normal speech of a peasant from these parts. If they were disguised, as I most certainly believe, then the twilight really did come in handy for them. For I simply can't understand how Jews would be able to make the streets unsafe when so few of them are tolerated in this country.
MARTIN KRUMM: Yes, yes, I'm positive that they were Jews too. Perhaps you aren't really well enough acquainted with that godless trash yet. As many as there are of them, without exception, are swindlers,

thieves, and highwaymen. And that's why it's a people which the Good Lord has cursed. It's a good thing I'm not the king. I wouldn't leave one of them, not a single one of them, alive. Oh! may God protect all upstanding Christians from these people. If the Good Lord didn't hate them himself, then why, in that terrible catastrophe a while back in Breslau, why did twice as many of them die as Christians? Our Reverend Preacher pointed that out very wisely in his last sermon. Why, it's as if they'd been listening and wanted to get revenge on our good master right away because of it. Oh! dear sir, if you want happiness and prosperity in the world watch out for Jews worse than for the plague!

TRAVELER: Would to God that that were only the voice of the common horde.

MARTIN KRUMM: Sir, for example: I was at the fair once—yes! when I think of the fair, straightaway I'd like to poison all the damn Jews all at once, if only I could. In the crowd they palmed this one's handkerchief, another's snuffbox and a third's watch, and I don't know what else! They're quick, unbelievably quick when it comes to stealing. A lot nimbler than our schoolmaster ever is on the organ. For example, sir: first of all they press up against you, just like I'm doing to you now—

TRAVELER: Just a bit more polite there, my friend!—

MARTIN KRUMM: Oh! Just let me show you. When they're standing like this—you see—then as quick as lightning they've got their hands on your pocket watch *(Instead of reaching for the pocket watch, he takes the snuffbox from his coat pocket.)* But then they can do all this with such skill, that you'd swear, their hands were going here when they're going there! If they are talking about the snuffbox, then they're surely aiming for your watch, and if they're talking about your watch, then what they really want to steal is your snuffbox. *(He's about to reach neatly for the watch, but is caught.)*

TRAVELER: Not so fast! Not so fast! What's your hand doing here?

MARTIN KRUMM: There, now, you can see, sir, what kind of a clumsy criminal I'd be. If a Jew had made a move like that, it would have been all over with the watch, that's for sure—But, I can see that I'm bothering you, so I'll take the liberty of commending myself to you, and for the good deeds you have rendered us, I'll remain forever Martin Krumm, your most obedient servant, most revered sir, the highly esteemed steward of this most noble nobleman's estate.

TRAVELER: Just go! Go!

MARTIN KRUMM: Just remember what I told you about the Jews. They're nothing but a godless thieving people!

Scene 3

The Traveler.

TRAVELER: Maybe this fellow, however stupid he is or pretends to be, is a more mischievous rogue than any Jew ever was! When a Jew practices deception, then, seven out of nine times, a Christian probably forced him into it. I doubt if many Christians can boast of having dealt honestly with a Jew: and they are surprised if he tries to repay them in kind? If trust and honesty are to reign between the two peoples, then both must contribute an equal share. But what's going to happen if for one of them it's an article of faith and practically a good deed to persecute the other? But—

Scene 4

The Traveler. Christoph.

TRAVELER: It's too bad that I always have to search for you for an hour whenever I want you.

CHRISTOPH: Surely you jest, sir. You'll certainly agree that I can only be in one place at a time, won't you? So is it my fault that you don't show up at that place? You can always find me right where I am, you know.

TRAVELER: Really? and you're already staggering? Now I understand why you're so insightful. Do you have to get drunk so early in the morning?

CHRISTOPH: You're talking about being drunk and I've hardly begun drinking! Except for a few good bottles of local wine, and a few glasses of brandy, and a bread roll, absolutely nothing has crossed my lips, as true as I'm standing here! I'm still completely sober.

TRAVELER: Oh! I can tell that just by looking at you! So I'm telling you as a friend, you should double your serving!

CHRISTOPH: Excellent advice! I will not neglect, as is my duty, to regard it as an order. I'll be off and you'll see just how obedient I can be!

TRAVELER: Don't be stupid! Instead of that, go and saddle the horses and pack up! I want to leave this morning.

CHRISTOPH: If you were only joking when you advised me to double

the size of my breakfast, how can I begin to imagine that you are speaking in earnest now? You seem to want to have fun at my expense today! Does the young lady put you in such a good mood? Oh, she's the sweetest child.—Just a little bit older, if only she were just a little bit older. Isn't that right, sir? If a young lady has not reached a certain maturity,—

TRAVELER: Go and carry out my orders!

CHRISTOPH: You're getting serious. Nevertheless, I'll wait until you tell me for the third time. It's too important a point! You could have been too rash. And I have always been in the habit of allowing my master time to think things over. Give it some thought,—departing so early from a place where we're practically waited on hand and foot. We only just got here yesterday. We really deserve so much from this gentleman for what we've done, and for all that, we've hardly enjoyed as much as a supper and a breakfast here.

TRAVELER: Your rudeness is unbearable. Once one has decided to be a servant, one should get used to making less fuss.

CHRISTOPH: Good, sir! You're beginning to moralize, that is: you're getting angry. Calm down! I'm on my way!

TRAVELER: You really must not be used to thinking about things much. What we did for this gentleman can no longer be called a good deed as soon as we seem to expect the slightest gratitude for it. I should not even have allowed myself to be pressed into coming here. The pleasure of having—with no end in mind—come to the aid of a stranger, is great enough in itself. And he himself would have wished more blessings our way as we left, than he now gives us in exaggerated thanks. Whomever one obliges to extensive gratitude with attendant expenses, he bestows a service in return that may well be more bitter to him than our good deed was to us. Most people are far too corrupt to experience the presence of a benefactor as anything but highly inconvenient. It seems to humble their pride;—

CHRISTOPH: Your philosophy, sir, leaves you out of breath. Good! You'll see, that I am just as magnanimous as you. I'm going; in a quarter of an hour, you should be able to ride off.

Scene 5

The Traveler. The Lady.

TRAVELER: The more I try to keep aloof from this fellow, the more he forces himself on me.

LADY: Why are you leaving us, sir? Why are you all alone here? In the

few hours that you have been with us, has our company become so repugnant to you? That would cause me great regret. I try to please all the world; and you, more than anyone else, I'd hate to displease.

TRAVELER: Excuse me, miss. I was just ordering my servant to make everything ready for our departure.

LADY: What are you talking about? your departure? But when did you arrive? It would be one thing if, a year from now, a melancholy hour were to give you such a notion. But what is this? you can't even bear to endure one whole day? That is too awful. I'll tell you, I'll get angry if you even so much as think about it again.

TRAVELER: You couldn't threaten me with anything more upsetting.

LADY: No? seriously? You would be upset if I were angry with you?

TRAVELER: Who could be indifferent to the wrath of a charming lady?

LADY: Your words sound almost as if you were making fun of me: but I will take them seriously; let's suppose I did make a mistake. So, good sir—I am moderately charming, as I have been told, and I'll tell you once again, I will be terribly, terribly angry if between now and the New Year, you give your leaving one more thought.

TRAVELER: How lovingly you've set the date. In the middle of winter, that's when you'd show me the door, in the most uncomfortable weather—

LADY: Oh dear! Who said that? I'm only saying that that's when, just for the sake of propriety, you can give a thought to leaving. We won't allow you to leave because of it; we'll ask you to—

TRAVELER: Also for the sake of propriety perhaps?

LADY: Oh dear! Who would think that such an honest face could be so mocking.—Oh! here comes Papa. I must be off! Don't tell him I was with you. As it is he reproaches me often enough for enjoying the company of men.

Scene 6

The Baron. The Traveler

BARON: Wasn't that my daughter with you? What on earth is the wild child running for?

TRAVELER: It is an inestimable good fortune to have such a pleasant and cheerful daughter. She's enchanting in her conversation, in which reigns the most charming innocence, the most unstudied wit.

BARON: You judge her too kindly. She has seldom been among her peers and possesses the art of pleasing, which one can hardly learn in the country, and which can often have a greater effect than beauty

itself, in but very small measure. Everything about her is still just the way nature created it.

TRAVELER: And that is all the more charming, the less one encounters it in the cities. Everything there is dissembled, forced, and artificial. Yes, it's even got to the point where the words *stupidity, rudeness,* and *nature* are thought to mean exactly the same thing.

BARON: What could please me more than seeing how exactly our thoughts and opinions correspond! Oh, if only I'd had a friend like you long ago!

TRAVELER: You being unfair to your other friends.

BARON: To my other friends, you say? I am fifty years old. Acquaintances I've had, but never a single friend. And never has friendship seemed so attractive to me as in the few hours that I've been striving to win yours. How can I be worthy of it?

TRAVELER: My friendship has so little meaning, that the simple desire for it is of sufficient merit to receive it. Your request is worth far more than what you're asking for.

BARON: Oh, sir, the friendship of a benefactor—

TRAVELER: If I may,—is no friendship! If you think of me under this false aspect, then I cannot be your friend. Let's assume, for one moment, that I were your benefactor, would I not have to be afraid that your friendship were nothing more than an effective gratitude?

BARON: Shouldn't one be able to combine the two?

TRAVELER: With great difficulty! The latter considers a noble spirit to be a duty; the former demands only voluntary movements of the soul.

BARON: But how can I—Your overly sensitive discernments in these matters leave me completely confused.—

TRAVELER: Just don't value me more highly than I deserve. At the most, I am a person who did his duty with pleasure. Duty, in and of itself, is worth no gratitude. That I did it with pleasure, however, for that, I am sufficiently rewarded by your friendship.

BARON: This magnanimity confuses me even more.—But perhaps I am too bold—I have not yet dared to ask your name, you station in society. Perhaps I am offering my friendship to someone who—who would despise—

TRAVELER: Forgive me, sir! You—You are making yourself—You have far too high an opinion of me.

BARON *(aside):* Should I really ask him then? He could be offended by my curiosity.

TRAVELER *(aside):* If he asks me, what will I answer him?

BARON *(aside):* I won't ask him then; he could think it an impertinence.
TRAVELLER *(aside):* Should I tell him the truth?
BARON *(aside):* So I'll chose the safest path. First I'll have his servant questioned.
TRAVELER *(aside):* If only I could be spared this confusion!—
BARON: Why so thoughtful?
TRAVELER: I was just about to ask you the same question, sir—
BARON: I know—one forgets oneself now and again. Let's talk about something else—You know, it really was Jews who attacked me. Just now my steward told me that he came upon three of the them on the highway a few days ago. The way he described them to me, they looked more like criminals than honest people. And why should I even have any doubts about it? A people that is so bent on profit asks little whether it makes it justly or unjustly, by cunning or by force. They seem to be made for trade, or, to call a spade a spade, for swindling. Polite, free, enterprising, discreet, these are characteristics that would make them laudable, if they didn't use them all too often for our misfortune.—*(He stops a moment)*—Jews have already caused me no end of harm and aggravation. When I was still in the military, I let myself be talked into cosigning a note for an acquaintance, and the Jew on whom it was drawn not only drove me to the point where I had to pay him, but where I had to pay him twice—Oh! they are the most evil, the most despicable people—What do you say? You seem quite depressed.
TRAVELER: What should I say? I must say, that I have heard this complaint very often—
BARON: And isn't it true that their facial features have something about them that sets us against them right away? It's almost as if you can see the spitefulness, unscrupulousness, selfishness, deceit, and perjury clearly in their eyes—But why are you turning away from me?
TRAVELER: As I hear, sir, you are such a great expert in physiognomy, and I'm worried lest mine—
BARON: Oh! You insult me! How could you even suspect such a thing? Without being an expert in physiognomy I must tell you that I have never seen such an upright, magnanimous, and pleasant expression as yours.
TRAVELER: To tell you the truth: I am not partial to general judgments about whole peoples—You won't take this liberty of mine the wrong way.—I would like to believe that among all nations there were good and evil souls. And among the Jews—

Scene 7

The Young Lady. The Traveler. The Baron.

LADY: Oh! Papa!—

BARON: Well, well! You're fine wild one! You ran away from me before: what was the meaning of that?

LADY: I didn't run way from you, Papa; but only from your reprimands.

BARON: The difference is very subtle. But what was it then that had earned my reprimand?

LADY: Oh, surely you know. After all, you saw it. I was with the gentleman—

BARON: So?—

LADY: And the gentleman is a man, and you've ordered me not to have all that much to do with men.—

BARON: You should have noticed that this gentleman is an exception. I would only wish that he could tolerate you—I would view it with great pleasure if you were constantly in his company.

LADY: Oh!—I'm sure it was the first and the last time. His servant was already packing—And that's just what I wanted to tell you.

BARON: What? who? his servant?

TRAVELER: Yes, sir, I ordered him to. My duties, and my fear of being a burden to you—

BARON: What in the name of Heaven am I to think of that? Am I to be denied the good fortune of being able to show you even better that you have bound a grateful heart to you? Oh! I beg you, add yet a second to your good deed which will be as valuable to me as was saving my life; stay awhile with me—at least a few days; I would needs reproach myself for all eternity if I were to allow a man like you to depart from me—unknown, unhonored, unrewarded—if it be in my power to do otherwise. I have invited some of my relations today, to share my pleasure with them, and to afford them the good fortune of making the acquaintance of my guardian angel.

TRAVELER: Sir, I simply must—

LADY: Stay here, sir, stay here! I'll run and tell your servant to unpack again. But there he is now.

Scene 8

Christoph, in boots and spurs, with two valises under his arms. The others.

CHRISTOPH. Well! Everything is ready, sir. Let's be off! Shorten your farewells a little. What's the use of all that talking if we can't stay here?

BARON: Whatever is preventing you from staying here?

CHRISTOPH: Certain considerations, Baron, sir, which have the subbornness of my master as their cause and his magnanimity as their pretext.

TRAVELER: My servant is often rather stupid: forgive him. I see that your requests really are more than just compliments. I surrender, so that I might not, from fear of being rude, be guilty of rudeness.

BARON: Oh! What thanks I owe you!

TRAVELER: You can go and unpack again! We won't leave until tomorrow.

LADY: Well! can't you hear? What are you standing there for? Go and unpack again.

CHRISTOPH: By rights I should be angry. I almost feel as though my wrath were about to erupt, but because nothing worse has come of this than that we are to stay here and be wined and dined and well taken care of—so be it! Usually I don't like people making unnecessary work for me,—don't you know?

TRAVELER: Be quiet! You are too impudent.

CHRISTOPH: Only because I tell the truth.

LADY: Oh! this is splendid that you're staying with us. Now I like you twice as well. Come, I'll show you our garden; you'll like it.

TRAVELER: If you like it, miss, that's as good as certain.

LADY: Come on now;—it's almost dinnertime. Papa, we have your permission, don't we?

BARON: I'll even accompany you myself.

LADY: No, no, we can't expect that of you! You must have things to do.

BARON: I have nothing more important to do now than to please my guest.

LADY: He won't hold it against you—isn't that right, sir? *(softly to him)* Do say no! I would so like to go alone with you.

TRAVELER: I will regret having so easily allowed myself to be convinced to stay here, as soon as I see that I am causing you the slightest inconvenience. So I beg you—

BARON: Oh why pay any attention to the child's talk?

LADY: Child?—Papa!—Don't embarrass me like that!—The gentleman will think I'm just a baby!—Don't worry about it! I'm old enough to go for a walk with you. Come!—But just look, your servant is still standing there with the valises under his arms.

CHRISTOPH: I would have thought that was only of concern to the one who was sweating over them!

TRAVELER: Be quiet! They do you more honor here than you deserve—

Scene 9

Lisette. The former.

BARON *(sees Lisette coming):* Sir, I'll follow you in just a moment, if you would like to accompany my daughter into the garden.

LADY: Oh! Stay as long as you want. We won't be at a loss to pass the time. Come! *(The Lady and the Traveler depart.)*

BARON: Lisette, I have something to say to you!—

LISETTE: Oh, what?

BARON *(softly to her):* I still don't know who our guest is. And for certain reasons, I don't want to ask him, either. Couldn't you talk to his servant and—

LISETTE: I know what you want. My own curiosity is driving me to that very thing—and that's why I came here.—

BARON: Do your best then,—and bring me the news. You will earn my gratitude.

LISETTE: Go on now.

CHRISTOPH: You won't take it amiss sir, that we like it here with you. But I beg you, don't put yourself out on my account; I'm satisfied with everything you have here.

BARON: Lisette, I give him into your care. Let him want for nothing. *(off)*

CHRISTOPH: So, mademoiselle, I commend myself to your good care, which will let me want for nothing. *(about to leave)*

Scene 10

Lisette. Christoph.

LISETTE *(stops him):* No, sir, I can't find it in my heart to let you be so discourteous. Am I not enough of a lady to be worth a short conversation?

CHRISTOPH: Jesus! You're very particular about these things, mamselle. Whether you're enough or too much of a lady I can't say. Judging by your talkative mouth, I could almost assert the latter. But be that as it may; you'll grant me my leave now;—As you can see, I have my hands and arms full.—As soon as I'm hungry or thirsty, I'll be at your door.

LISETTE: That's just what our master of the harness does too!
CHRISTOPH: Hang it! He must be a clever fellow: he does it like me.
LISETTE: If you want to meet him, he's on a chain at the back of the house.
CHRISTOPH: Damn! I do believe you mean the dog. I see that you must have thought I meant physical hunger and thirst. But that's not what I meant—I meant the hunger and thirst of love. That, mademoiselle, that! Are you satisfied with my explanation now?
LISETTE: More than with what it was you explained!
CHRISTOPH: Oh my! Just between us:—Are you saying then that it would not be unwelcome to you if I were to offer you my love?
LISETTE: Perhaps! Do you want to offer it to me? in all seriousness?
CHRISTOPH: Perhaps!
LISETTE: For shame! What kind of an answer is that? perhaps?
CHRISTOPH: And yet it wasn't one whit different from yours!
LISETTE: Yes, but in my mouth it meant something entirely different! "Perhaps" is a lady's greatest insurance. For no matter how bad our game, we must never let anybody see our cards.
CHRISTOPH: Well, if that's the way it is!—I thought we were going to get down to businss.—*(He hurls both valises to the ground.)* I don't know why I'm making myself sweat like this! It's like this!—I love you, mamselle.
LISETTE: That's what I call saying a lot with very little. Let's analyze this more closely—
CHRISTOPH: No, let's just drop it entirely. But—just so we can divulge our thoughts to each other in peace;—Would you care to have a seat?—Standing makes me tired.—No need for ceremony! *(He forces her to sit on the valise)*—I love you, mamselle.—
LISETTE: But,—This seat's awfully hard—you know, I think there are books in here—
CHRISTOPH: And very romantic and clever ones at that;—and still you find them hard to sit on? It's my master's traveling library. It consists of comedies to make you cry, and tragedies to make you laugh, of romantic epics, profound drinking songs, and whatever other new things like that he has. But let's change seats! You sit on mine!—No need for ceremony!—mine is the softest.
LISETTE: Forgive me—I would not be so rude—
CHRISTOPH: No need for ceremony,—No fuss now!—You don't want to? Then I'll carry you.—
LISETTE: Well, if you're ordering me to—*(She stands up and is about to sit on the other one.)*

CHRISTOPH: Ordering? God forbid!—No! ordering, that's going too far.—If you're going to take it like that, then you'd better stay where you are! *(He sits down on his valise again.)*

LISETTE *(aside):* The ruffian! But I'll just have to put up with it—

CHRISTOPH: Where were we then?—Yes,—talking about love—So, I love you, mamselle. *Je vous aime,* I'd say, if you were a French marquise.

LISETTE: Jesus! You're not French are you?

CHRISTOPH: No, I must confess my disgrace: I'm only a German. But I have had the good fortune of keeping company with various Frenchmen, and that's how I kind of learned just what makes for an upright fellow! I think you can tell just by looking at me.

LISETTE: So you and your master come from France, perhaps?

CHRISTOPH: Oh no!—

LISETTE: Well then where do you come from then?

CHRISTOPH: Where we come from is a few miles past France.

LISETTE: You don't mean from Italy?

CHRISTOPH: Not far from there.

LISETTE: From England then?

CHRISTOPH: Almost; England is a province of it. We live over fifty miles from here. But—my God!—my horses,—the poor creatures are still saddled. Excuse me, mamselles!—Hurry up! Stand up! *(He puts the valises under his arm again).*—Despite my fervent love, I have to go and do what must be done. We still have the whole day, and more importantly, the whole night in front of us. We'll still come together on this. I'll know how to find you.

Scene 11

Martin Krumm. Lisette.

LISETTE: I won't be able to learn very much from him! Either he's too stupid or too shrewd, and both make you inscrutable.

MARTIN KRUMM: Well, Miss Lisette? So that's the man that's supposed to replace me in your affections?

LISETTE: He didn't have to.

MARTIN KRUMM: Didn't have to? And here I thought I was firmly ensconced in your heart.

LISETTE: That's just it, Steward, you *thought* so. People of your sort have the right to think tasteless thoughts. That's why I'm not upset that you thought it, but just that you told me. I'd like to know what business my heart is of yours? With what favors, with what presents

have you won a right to it? It's not the done thing anymore to give one's heart away just any old time. And do you think that I'm really so hard up with mine? I'll surely find an honest man for it before I cast it to the swine.

MARTIN KRUMM: Jesus! That's made me all stuffed up! I'll have to take a pinch of tobacco now. Perhaps it'll go away again if I sneeze. *(He pulls out the stolen box, plays with it in his hands, and finally takes a pinch in an absurdly arrogant manner.)*

LISETTE *(eyeing him furtively from the side):* Damn! where did this fellow get that box from?

MARTIN KRUMM: Would you care for a pinch?

LISETTE: Oh, your most humble servant, Mr. Steward, sir! *(She takes a pinch.)*

MARTIN KRUMM: What a difference a silver box makes!—Could an earwig be more pliant?

LISETTE: Is it a silver box?

MARTIN KRUMM: If it weren't silver, it wouldn't be Martin Krumm's.

LISETTE: Aren't I allowed to have a look at it?

MARTIN KRUMM: Yes, but only if I don't let go of it.

LISETTE: The design is superb.

MARTIN KRUMM: Yes, it weighs almost three ounces.

LISETTE: Just for the design, I'd like to have a box like that.

MARTIN KRUMM: When I have it melted down, the design will be all yours.

LISETTE: You're too kind! Of course, it must be a present.

MARTIN KRUMM: Yes—it didn't cost me a penny!

LISETTE: You know, a present like that could really dazzle a lady! You'll be able to get anything you want with that, Steward. At least, *I* would hardly be able to defend myself if someone were to come at me with a silver box. With a box like that, a lover would have an easy time of it with me.

MARTIN KRUMM: I see, I see!—

LISETTE: Seeing as it didn't cost you anything, Steward, I'd advise you to make a good friend for yourself with it—

MARTIN KRUMM: I see, I see!—

LISETTE *(in a flattering voice):* Wouldn't you like to give it to me then?—

MARTIN KRUMM: Oh, forgive me!—It's not the done thing anymore to give away silver boxes just any old time. And do you think, Miss Lisette, that I'm so hard up with mine? I'm sure I'll be able to find an honest man for it, before I cast it to the swine.

LISETTE: Has anyone ever seen such stupid rudeness!—Thinking a snuffbox is as precious as a heart?

MARTIN KRUMM: Well, a heart of stone and a snuffbox of silver—

LISETTE: Perhaps it would cease to be of stone if—But all my words are in vain—You are not worthy of my love—What a good-hearted fool I am!—*(almost in tears)* and I almost believed that the steward was one of those honest people who mean what they say—

MARTIN KRUMM: And what a good-hearted fool I am, to believe that a woman means what she says. There, my little Lisette, don't cry!—*(He gives her the box.)* But now I really am worthy of your love, aren't I? Just to begin with, I won't ask for anything more than to give your hand a little kiss!—*(He kisses her.)* Oh, how wonderful that tastes!—

Scene 12

The Lady. Lisette. Martin Krumm.

LADY *(she comes creeping up and pushes his head onto Lisette's hand):* Hey, Steward—kiss my hand too!

LISETTE: What the—

MARTIN KRUMM: Gladly, milady—*(about to kiss her hand)*

LADY *(slaps his face):* You lout! Can't you understand a joke?

MARTIN KRUMM: The devil takes jokes like that!

LISETTE: Ha! ha! ha! *(Laughs at him.)* Oh, I' sorry for you, my dear Steward—Ha! ha! ha!

MARTIN KRUMM: Oh?? and you're laughing too? Is that the thanks I get? Well that's fine, just fine! *(off)*

LISETTE: Ha! ha! ha!

Scene 13

Lisette. The Lady.

LADY: I wouldn't have believed it if I hadn't seen it with my own eyes. You let yourself be kissed? And by the Steward at that?

LISETTE: I'm sure I don't know what right you have to spy on me? I thought you'd gone for a walk in the garden with the foreigner.

LADY: Yes, and I'd still be with him if Papa hadn't come along! But as it was I couldn't say one witty thing to him. Papa is much too serious.

LISETTE: Oh? What do you call witty? What do you have to say to him that your Papa couldn't hear.

LADY: Thousands of things!—But you'll make me angry if you ask me any more. All right, I like the foreign gentleman. I can certainly admit that, can't I?

LISETTE: But you'd probably have a terrible fight with your Papa if he were to bring you a bridegroom like that one day, wouldn't you? And in all seriousness, who knows what he will do? It's just a pity that your aren't a few years older: otherwise it could happen very soon.

LADY: Oh, if it's only a matter of age, Papa can just make me a few years older. I certainly won't contradict him.

LISETTE: No, I know something even better. I'll give you a few of my years, then we'll both get something out of it. Then I won't be too old and you won't be too young.

LADY: Yes, that's true! That will work!

LISETTE: Here comes the foreigner's servant; I have to speak with him. It's all in your best interest—Leave me alone with him.—Go on!

LADY: Don't forget about the years though—Do you hear, Lisette?

Scene 14

Lisette. Christoph.

LISETTE: Sir, surely you must be hungry or thirsty to be back again already, eh?

CHRISTOPH: Yes, of course!—But don't forget how I explained that hunger and thirst. To tell you the truth, my dear young lady, I had already cast my eye on you as soon as I got off my horse yesterday. But because I would only be staying here a few hours, I didn't think it would be worth the trouble to introduce myself to you. What would we have been able to do in such a short time? We would have had to have begun our story at the end. And it's not completely certain yet that we can still pull this off.

LISETTE: That's true! but at least now we can go about it properly. You can make me your proposal; I can give you my answer. I can tell you my doubts, you can refute them. We can think carefully about every step we take and neither of us will be able to sell the other a pig in a poke. If only you had made me your offer of love first thing yesterday; it's true, I would have accepted it. But just think how much I would have been risking had I not even had time to inquire about your station, wealth, country, service, and other such things?

CHRISTOPH: Jesus! Would that really have been so necessary? So much fuss? You really couldn't make more if we were getting married?—

LISETTE: Oh, if I only thought of it as a plain old wedding it would be

absurd to be so conscientious. But with a love affair it is quite something else indeed! In that case the silliest trifle becomes an important point! So don't think you'll get the slightest kindness from me if you don't satisfy my curiosity in every detail.

CHRISTOPH: Oh? How far does this curiosity of yours extend?

LISETTE: Because you can best judge a servant by his master, I want to know first and foremost—

CHRISTOPH: Who my master is? Ha! ha! that's funny. You're asking me something I'd like to ask you, if I thought you knew more than I.

LISETTE: And you think you can get away with that trite excuse? In short, I must know who your master is, or our whole friendship is over.

CHRISTOPH: I've only known my master for four weeks. That's how long ago he took me into his service in Hamburg. From that point on I attended him, but I never bothered to inquire about his station or his name. This much is certain—he must be rich; for he let neither himself nor me suffer any want on the journey. What more do I need to worry about?

LISETTE: What can I expect from your love when you won't even trust such a trifle to my discretion. I would never ever treat you like that. For example, here I have a beautiful silver snuffbox—

CHRISTOPH: Yes? And?

LISETTE: You'd only have to ask me just a little and I'd tell you whom I got it from—

CHRISTOPH: Oh! Well, that's really not very important to me! I'd rather know who's supposed to get it from you.

LISETTE: On that point I really haven't decided anything yet. But if you shouldn't get it then you have nobody else to blame but yourself. I certainly wouldn't let your honesty go unrewarded.

CHRISTOPH: Or rather my talkativeness. But, as true as I'm an honest fellow, if I am being closemouthed this time, then it's from necessity. Because I know nothing that I could blab about. Damn it! I'd be happy to pour out my secrets if I only had some.

LISETTE: Adieu! I won't assail your virtue any longer. I only hope it helps you get a silver box and a sweetheart soon, just as it's deprived you of both now. *(about to go)*

CHRISTOPH: Where are you going? Be patient! *(aside)* I'm going to have to lie. For surely I shouldn't let a present like that slip through my fingers? What will it hurt anyway?

LISETTE: Well, do you want to be more specific? But,—I can see that it's too much for you. No, no, I don't want to know anything.

CHRISTOPH: Yes, yes. You shall know everything!—*(aside)* If only I

really knew how to lie well. Just listen! My master is—is a nobleman. He comes—together we come from—from—Holland. Because of certain unpleasantnesses—a trifle—because of a murder—he had to—flee.

LISETTE: What? Because of a murder?

CHRISTOPH: Yes,—but because of an honorable murder—flee because of a duel—And right now—he's on the run.

LISETTE: And you, my friend?

CHRISTOPH: I'm on the run with him too. The victim had us—I mean the friends of the victim are pursuing us; and because of this pursuit—Now you can easily guess the rest—What the devil is one to do? Think about it yourself; a saucy young fop insults us. My master knocks him down. That's what had to happen. If someone insults me, I do the same thing,—or—or I box his ears. An honest fellow can't put up with anything.

LISETTE: That's good! I like people like that! Because I'm a bit intolerant too. But look, your master's coming. You wouldn't think to look at him that he could be so angry, so cruel.

CHRISTOPH: Come on! let's get out of his way. He might be able to tell that I've betrayed him just by looking at me.

LISETTE: I'm satisfied with—

CHRISTOPH: But the silver box—

LISETTE: Come on. *(aside)* First I want to see what I'll get from my master for the secret I've discovered: if all my trouble was worth it, then he shall have it.

Scene 15

The Traveler.

TRAVELER: I miss my box. It's a trifle; still the loss is painful to me. Could the Steward have?—But no, I could have lost it—I could have pulled it out carelessly.—I mustn't insult anyone with my suspicions. Nevertheless—He pressed himself up against me;—he reached for my watch:—I caught him; could he have also reached for my box without my having caught him?

Scene 16

Martin Krumm. The Traveler.

MARTIN KRUMM *(when he becomes aware of the traveler, he starts to turn around again):* Oh dear!

TRAVELER: Well, well, come closer, my friend! *(aside)* He's as shy as if he knew my thoughts!—Well? come closer!

MARTIN KRUMM *(defiantly):* Oh! I don't have time. I already know you want to chat with me. I have more important things to do. I don't want to hear about your exploits ten times. Tell them to someone who doesn't know about them yet.

TRAVELER: What's this I'm hearing? Before, the Steward was ingenuous and polite. Now he's impudent and rude. Which is your real mask then?

MARTIN KRUMM: Oh! Where the devil do you get off calling my face a mask? I don't want to fight with you,—otherwise—*(He's about to leave.)*

TRAVELER: His impudent behavior confirms my suspicion.—No, no, be patient! There's something important I have to ask you—

MARTIN KRUMM: And I won't give you an answer, no matter how important it is. So just spare yourself the question.

TRAVELER: I'll risk it—But, how sorry I would be if I were to do him wrong—My friend, have you seen my box? It's missing.—

MARTIN KRUMM: What sort of a question is that? Is it my fault that someone stole it from you? What do you think I am? the fence? or the thief?

TRAVELER: Who said anything about stealing? You're practically giving yourself away—

MARTIN KRUMM: I'm giving myself away? So you think I have it? Do you know what it means when you accuse an honest fellow of something like that? Do you know?

TRAVELER: Why are you shouting like that? I haven't accused you of anything yet. You're your own accuser. And for all that, I don't know if I would be so wrong. Who was it that I caught before when he was trying to reach for my watch?

MARTIN KRUMM: Oh, you're a man who can't understand a joke. Listen!—*(aside)* If only he didn't see Lisette with it—surely the girl won't be a fool and show off with it—

TRAVELER: Oh, I understand your joke so well that I think you want to joke around with my box too. But if you take the joke too far, then it finally gets serious. I'm sorry about your good name. Even suppose I were convinced what you really didn't mean any harm, would others also—

MARTIN KRUMM: Oh,—others!—others! Others would long since be sick of being accused of something like this. But, if you think that I have it: pat me down,—search me—

TRAVELER: That's not my job. And moreover, people don't carry everything with them in their pockets.

MARTIN KRUMM: All right! so you can see that I'm an honest fellow, I'll turn my pockets inside out myself! Pay attention! *(aside)* It would be really bad luck if it were to fall out!

TRAVELER: Oh, don't go to any bother!

MARTIN KRUMM: No, no: you'll see, you'll see. *(He turns one pocket inside out.)* Is that a box? There are bread crumbs in there: goodness me! *(He turns the second inside out.)* There's nothing in there either! Oh,—yes, there is! a little piece of a calendar.—I keep it for the verses over the months. You're really queer!—All right, let's get on with it. Pay attention: I'll turn the third one inside out. *(When he turns it inside out, two big beards fall out.)* Jesus! what did I drop there? *(He tries to pick them up quickly, but the traveler is quicker and grabs one of them.)*

TRAVELER: What's this supposed to be?

MARTIN KRUMM *(aside)*: Oh, damn it! I thought I'd gotten rid of that stuff a long time ago.

TRAVELER: Why, that's a beard. *(He holds it up to his chin.)* Don't I look like a Jew now?—

MARTIN KRUMM: Oh, give it here! give it here! Who knows that you're thinking this time? I sometimes frighten my little boy with it. That's what it's for.

TRAVELER: You'll be so kind as to let me have it. I want to do some frightening with it too.

MARTIN KRUMM. Oh! Don't try and take me on! I have to have it back! *(He tries to rip it out of his hand.)*

TRAVELER. Go, or—

MARTIN KRUMM *(aside)*: Jesus! Now I'll have to find a way out of this somehow.—It's all right; it's all right! I see that you came here to be my undoing. But, devil take me, I am an honest fellow, and I'd like to see the man that can spread foul gossip about me. Just you take note of that. No matter what happens, I can swear that I didn't use the beard for anything bad.—*(off)*

Scene 17

The Traveler.

TRAVELER: The man himself makes me suspect something very prejudicial to him.—Couldn't he have been one of the disguised robbers?—But I would rather be cautious in my suspicion.

Scene 18

The Baron. The Traveler.

TRAVELER: Would you believe that yesterday when I got into that fight with those Jewish highwaymen I pulled out one of their beards? *(He shows him the beard.)*

BARON: What do you make of that, sir?—But why did you leave me so suddenly in the garden?

TRAVELER: Forgive my discourtesy. I meant to come right back to you. I only went to look for my box which I must have lost somewhere around here.

BARON: That wounds me to the quick. That you should suffer a loss while here with me?

TRAVELER: It would be no great loss—But just have a look at this handsome beard!

BARON: You've already showed it to me. Why?

TRAVELER: I'll explain myself to you more clearly. I think—but no, I'll keep my suspicions to myself.—

BARON: Your suspicions? Explain yourself?

TRAVELER: No; I've been too rash. I could be mistaken—

BARON: You're making me nervous.

TRAVELER: What do you think of our steward?

BARON: No, no; we're not going to steer the conversation to something else—I beg you by the good deed you have done me, tell me what you believe, what you suspect, what you could be mistaken about!

TRAVELER: Only your answer to my question can impel me to tell you.

BARON: What I think of my steward? I think him an honest and upstanding man.

TRAVELER: Then forget that I wanted to say anything.

BARON: A beard,—suspicions,—the steward,—how am I to put all these things together? Do my requests have no effect on you? You could be mistaken? Let's assume you were mistaken; what risk would you be running with a friend?

TRAVELER: Your entreaties are too much for me. I'll tell you then, that the steward carelessly dropped this beard; that he had another one, which he hastily put back in his pocket; that his words betrayed a person who believes that people will think him as evil as his deeds; that I also caught him in a none too honest, at least, none too clever move.

BARON: It's as if my eyes had suddenly been opened. I fear,—You are not mistaken. And you had doubts about telling me something like

this? I'll go this instant and make every effort to get to the truth! Could it be that I have my murderer in my own house?

TRAVELER: But don't be angry with me, if, fortunately, you should find my suspicions to be false. You forced them out of me, otherwise I would most certainly have kept silent about them.

BARON: Whether I find them to be true or false, I will always be grateful to you for them.

Scene 19

The Traveler, and afterwards, Christoph.

TRAVELER: If only he doesn't deal too hastily with him. For no matter how great the suspicion is, the man could still be innocent. I am quite ill at ease. Indeed, it is no small matter to make a master so suspicious of his subordinates. Even if he finds them to be innocent, still he loses his trust in them forever.—Now, on second thoughts, I'm sure I should have kept silent.—Won't people think that my suspicion had selfishness and revenge as its cause? What if they learn that I blame him for my loss?—I'd give anything if I could still prevent the investigation—

CHRISTOPH *(approaches laughing):* Ha! ha! ha! Do you know who you are, sir?

TRAVELER: Do you know that you're a fool? What are you asking?

CHRISTOPH: Good, if you don't know, I'll tell you. You are a nobleman. You come from Holland. You had some trouble and a duel there. You had the good fortune of skewering a young know-it-all. The friends of the victim are pursuing you vigorously. You are on the run! And I have the honor of attending you on the run.

TRAVELER: Are you dreaming or are you mad?

CHRISTOPH: Neither. Then for a madman, my speech is too clever, and for a dreamer, too crazy.

TRAVELER: Who told you this absurd tale?

CHRISTOPH: Oh? So you think someone would have had to make it up for me? But don't you think it extremely well devised? In the short time I had to lie, I'm sure I couldn't have come up with anything better. At least now you are safe from further curiosity.

TRAVELER: But what am I to make of all this?

CHRISTOPH: Nothing more than you want to; leave the rest to me. Listen to how it happened. They asked me for your name, station, country, duties; I didn't keep them waiting for an answer, I said everything I knew; that is, I said I knew nothing. You won't have any

difficulty believing that this news was very inadequate, and that they had little cause to be satisfied with it. So they kept on pressing me for more; but in vain! I said nothing, because I had nothing to say. But finally, a present they offered me made me say more than I knew; that is: I lied.

TRAVELER: Wretch! I see I'm in fine hands with you.

CHRISTOPH: Surely my lies can't have been the truth just by coincidence?

TRAVELER: Insolent liar! You've gotten me in such a muddle, out of which—

CHRISTOPH: Out of which you can immediately extricate yourself as soon as you make that lovely little name, which you were so kind as to call me just now, better known.

TRAVELER: But won't I be forced to reveal myself then?

CHRISTOPH: All the better! Then I'll finally have a chance to make your acquaintance too. But judge for yourself whether, in all good conscience, I could have had a bad conscience about these lies. *(He pulls the box out.)* Look at this box! Could I have earned it more easily?

TRAVELER: Show it to me!—*(He takes it in his hand.)* What's this I see?

CHRISTOPH: Ha! ha! ha! I thought you'd be amazed! You would have lied up a storm yourself if you could have earned a box like this.

TRAVELER: So you're the one who stole it from me?

CHRISTOPH: What? What was that?

TRAVELER: Your disloyalty does not vex me as much as the all too rash suspicion I have brought upon an honest man because of it. And you're shamelessly brazen enough to try to convince me that it was a—although obtained almost as despicably—present? Go! Get out of my sight and don't come back!

CHRISTOPH: Are you dreaming, or—out of respect I won't mention the other. Jealousy couldn't possibly be the cause of such excesses. The box is supposed to be yours? I'm supposed to have stolen it from you, *salva venia*. If that were the case, I'd have to be a stupid idiot to flaunt it in front of you of all people! Good—here comes Lisette! Come quickly! Help me bring my master to his senses again.

Scene 20

Lisette. The Traveler. Christoph.

LISETTE: Oh sir, what a commotion you're causing here. What ever did our steward do to you? You made the master absolutely furious with him. They're talking about beards, and boxes, and plundering; the

steward is crying and cursing and saying that he's innocent, and that you're lying. The master can't be calmed down, he's even sent for the warden and the bailiff, to have him locked up. What's the meaning of all that?

CHRISTOPH: Oh, that's not all yet, just listen, just listen to what he has in mind for me—

TRAVELER: Yes, indeed, my dear Lisette, I have been too rash. The steward is innocent. It was my godless servant who plunged me into this trouble. He's the one who stole my box from me—and I suspected the steward of doing it; and the beard really could have been a children's game, as he said. I'll go and give him satisfaction, I'll confess my mistake; whatever he demands, I'll—

CHRISTOPH: No, no, stay! First you must give me satisfaction. To hell with it, Lisette, speak up, say how things really are. I wish you were swinging from the gallows with your wretched box. Am I supposed to let myself be called a thief because of it? Didn't you give it to me?

LISETTE: Yes, of course! And you should keep it too.

TRAVELER: So it's true then? But the box belongs to me!

LISETTE: To you? I didn't know that!

TRAVELER: And so Lisette must have found it? and my carelessness is to blame for all this confusion? *(to Christoph)* I have also done you wrong. Forgive me. I am truly ashamed to have been so rash.

LISETTE *(aside):* Jesus! Now it makes sense to me! Oh, I'm sure he wasn't too rash at all.

TRAVELER: Come we'll—

Scene 21

The Baron. The Traveler. Lisette. Christoph.

BARON *(quickly joins them):* Lisette, give the gentleman back his box this very instant! Everything is out in the open. He has confessed everything. And you weren't ashamed to take presents from someone like that? Well? Where is the box?

TRAVELER: So it really is true?

LISETTE: The gentleman's had it back again for ages. I thought that if you could accept someone's services, I could certainly accept that someone's presents! I knew as little about him as you!

CHRISTOPH: So, I guess my present has gone to blazes? Easy come, easy go!

BARON: But, dearest friend, how shall I show you my gratitude? For the second time you pull me out of equally great danger. I owe you my

life. Without you, I would never have discovered my imminent misfortune. The warden, the man I considered to be the most honest on all my estates, was his godless accomplice. Ask yourself whether I could ever have foreseen this? If you had journeyed from me today—

TRAVELER: It's true—then the help which I thought I had rendered you yesterday would have been very incomplete. I consider myself most fortunate, that Heaven has selected me for this unexpected discovery, and now I rejoice as much as I previously trembled with the fear of making a mistake.

BARON: I admire the love you have for your fellow man as well as your magnanimity. Oh, I only hope that what Lisette reported to me is true!

Scene 22

The Lady and the others.

LISETTE: Well, why shouldn't it be true?

BARON: Come, my daughter, come! Join your plea to mine: beseech my savior to take your hand in marriage, and with your hand, my fortune. What can I give him in my gratitude that is more precious than you, whom I love just as much as him? Do not be at all surprised that I could make you such an offer. Your servant has revealed to us who you are. Allow me the inestimable pleasure of my gratitude. My fortune is equal to my station, and the latter equal to yours. Here you are safe from your enemies and will be among friends who will adore you. But suddenly you seem despondent? What am I to think?

LADY: Are you perhaps worried because of me? I assure you I will obey Papa with pleasure!

TRAVELER: Your generosity astonishes me. From the magnitude of the reward you offer me, I only now realize the smallness of my good deed. But what shall I answer you? My servant did not speak the truth and I—

BARON: Would to God that you really weren't who you said you were. Would to God your station were lower than mine. Then my reward would be a little more precious, and you would perhaps be less disinclined to grant my request.

TRAVELER *(aside):* Why do I not just reveal myself? Sir, your magnanimity fills my whole soul, but blame fate, not me, that your offer is in vain. I am—

BARON: Already married perhaps?

TRAVELER: No—
BARON: Well? What?
TRAVELER: I am a Jew.
BARON: A Jew? cruel fate!
CHRISTOPH: A Jew?
LISETTE: A Jew?
LADY: Oh, what difference does that make?
LISETTE: Sh! milady, sh! I'll explain later what difference it makes.
BARON: So are there cases then where Heaven itself keeps us from being grateful?
TRAVELER: You have made it unnecessary by the very fact that you want to be grateful.
BARON: Then I will at least do as much as fate allows me to do. Take my whole fortune. I would rather be poor and grateful than rich and ungrateful.
TRAVELER: This offer too is in vain in my case, as the God of my fathers has given me more than I need. For my whole reward I ask nothing but that in the future you judge my people a little less harshly and less categorically. I did not hide from you because I am ashamed of my religion. No! but I saw what you had a liking for me and a loathing for my nation. And anyone's friendship, whoever he may be, has always been invaluable to me.
BARON: I am ashamed of my conduct.
CHRISTOPH: And I'm just beginning to recover from my astonishment. What? You are a Jew and had the audacity to take an honest Christian into your service? You should have been serving me! That would have been right according to the Bible. Holy Christ! You insulted all of Christendom in me. That's why I couldn't figure out why he refused to eat any pork on the journey and was up to all kinds of other tomfoolery.—Don't think for one moment that I'll attend you any longer! And I'll bring charges against you into the bargain.
TRAVELER: I can't expect you to think any better than the rest of the common Christian horde. I will not remind you of the miserable conditions I wrenched you from in Hamburg. Nor will I force you to stay with me any longer. But because I am more or less satisfied with your services, and, moreover, because, just a while ago I harbored an unjustified suspicion against you, you shall keep as a reward that which caused my suspicion. *(Gives him the box.)* You can have your reward too. So, go wherever you want to!
CHRISTOPH: No, by Christ! There must be Jews who aren't Jews at all.

You are an honest man. Done! I'll stay with you! A Christian would have given me a kick in the ribs and no box!

BARON: All I see of you delights me. Come, let's see that the culprits are put into safe custody. Oh, how worthy of respect would all Jews be if they were all like you!

TRAVELER: And how delightful the Christians, if they all had your character!

(The Baron, the Lady and the Traveler off.)

Last Scene

Lisette, Christoph.

LISETTE: So, my friend, did you lie to me before?

CHRISTOPH: Yes, and for two reasons. Firstly, because I didn't know the truth and secondly, because for a box that one has to give back anyway, one can't really speak much of the truth.

LISETTE: And if it comes to that, are you really a Jew too, no matter how much you pretend?

CHRISTOPH: That question's too inquisitive for a young miss! Come on now!

(He puts his arm around her and they walk off together)

End of The Jews

Concerning the Comedy THE JEWS

Amongst the acclaim which the two comedies in the fourth part of my writings have found, I count, and rightly so, the remarks of which one, *The Jews*, has been judged worthy. I ask in all urgency that it be not ascribed to any inability to tolerate criticism, if I now make ready to reply to them. That I do not overlook them in silence is, rather, a sign that they were not repugnant to me, that I have pondered them, and that I wish for nothing more earnestly, that to learn the legitimate opinions of the art critics, which I will thereupon, should they unhappily fail to convince me, acknowledge with thanks.

These remarks were made in the seventieth issue of the Göttingen *Journal of Scholarly Matters* of this year, and assented to in the Jena scholarly journals. I must, of necessity, reproduce them here, if I do not

wish to confuse those of my readers who have not laid eyes on them. "The purpose of this comedy," as my opponent so kindly says, "is a matter of most serious moral philosophy, namely, to show the foolishness and unjustness of the hatred and contempt with which we usually treat the Jews. Therefore, one cannot read this comedy without that tale of an honest Jew in Mr. Gellert's *The Swedish Countess*—which was written with the same purpose—necessarily coming to mind.* On reading both of them, however, one's enjoyment, as we experienced only too well, is constantly interrupted by something we would like to make known, either to raise some misgivings about it, or for the future improvement of fictions of this kind. In all these plays the unknown traveler is so completely good, so noble, so concerned that he may perchance have wronged his neighbor and insulted him with his suspicion, that while it is not impossible, it is certainly all too improbable that, amongst a people of these principles, this life-style and this education, which cannot but repay its evil treatment by the Christians with all too much enmity, or, at least, indifference, towards Christians, such a noble spirit could evolve, as it were, on its own. This improbability disturbs our enjoyment all the more, the more we wish that such a noble and beautiful image could be true and could really exist. But even mediocre virtue and probity are to be found so rarely among this people that the few examples thereof do not diminish the hatred against them as much as one would wish. According to the principles of moral philosophy, which at least the greater part of them have accepted, even a general probity is scarcely possible, especially as almost the entire people must live by trade, which gives more opportunity for and temptation to deceit than other ways of life."

It can easily be seen that these objections come down to two points. Firstly, that an upright and noble Jew, in and of himself, is something improbable; secondly, that the use of such a Jew in my comedy is improbable. It is apparent that the second does not follow from the first; and it is equally apparent that I would really only be able to safeguard myself with respect to the latter if I were to prefer the love of mankind to my honor, and preferred to lose on the latter point rather than on the former. Nevertheless, however, I must first speak my mind on the latter.

Did I use an upstanding, noble Jew in my comedy against all

*Christian Fürchtegott Gellert's novel, *The Life of the Swedish Countess of G.* was published in two volumes in 1747–48. In the second part Count G., telling of his experiences as a Russian captive, extols the virtue and humanity of a Jew and a young girl.

probability?—I have still to analyze this according to the particular concepts of my opponent. He attributes the improbability of such a Jew to the contempt and oppression under which these people labor and to the necessity in which they find themselves of living exclusively from trade. Be that as it may; must one not necessarily conclude that the improbability would disappear as soon as these circumstances ceased to occasion it? When will they cease to do this, however? Doubtlessly after thay have been destroyed by other circumstances, that is, when a Jew is in a position not to feel the contempt and the oppression of the Christians so keenly, and does not see himself compelled to sustain a miserable life through the benefits of some small despicable trade. What more could be required for this than wealth? But yes, the appropriate application of this wealth is also required. Now let us see whether I did not introduce both into the character of my Jew? He is rich; he says himself that the God of his fathers has given him more than he needs; I portray him on a journey; indeed, I even exempt him from that ignorance in which one could assume him to be; he reads, and is not without his books even on his journey. So tell me, is it thus still really true, that my Jew would have had to have evolved on his own? If one were to insist, however, that wealth, better experience, and an enlightened intellect could only have no effect on a Jew, then I would have to say that this is exactly the prejudice that I have tried to weaken through my comedy; a prejudice that can only flow from pride or hate, and that not only makes Jews brutish people, but, in fact, puts them far beneath humanity. Now if this prejudice is insuperable in my fellow Christians, then I dare not flatter myself that my play will ever be seen with pleasure. Do I want to convince them that each and every Jew is upstanding and generous, or even to accept the majority as that? I say it bluntly, even if my character were a Christian, his character would be very rare, and if only rarity determines improbability, very improbable too.—

I have now slowly come to the first point. Is a Jew, as I have drawn him, in and of himself improbable: and why is he thus? One will refer to the above-named causes. But, cannot these in fact disappear just as easily in ordinary life as they do in my play? Certainly, in order to believe this, one must be better acquainted with Jews other than that abominable trash that roams around at fairs. But I prefer to let another talk here, whom this circumstance must touch more deeply; one from this nation itself. I know him too well to deny him here the testimony of a man who is as intelligent as he is learned and honest. He wrote the following letter on the occasion of the Göttingen objections to a friend

among his people who is his complete equal in good qualities. I foresee that people will find it hard to believe, and may consider this letter rather to be a fiction of mine, but I offer to convince incontrovertibly those, to whom it is of great import, of the authenticity of the same. Here it is.*

"*Dear Sir,*

"I sent you herewith the seventieth issue of the Göttingen *Scholarly Journal.* Read the article about Berlin. The learned journalists reviewed the fourth part of Lessing's writings, which we have so often read with pleasure. What do you think they criticize in the comedy, *The Jews?* The protagonist, who, as they put it, is much too noble and much too generous. The pleasure, so they say, which we experience in the beauty of such a character, is disrupted by its improbability, and that, finally, nothing remains in our hearts but the mere desire for his existence. These thoughts made me blush with shame. I am not capable of expressing everything they caused me to feel. What a humiliation for our oppressed nation! What exaggerated contempt! That ordinary Christian people have from time immemorial regarded us as the dregs of nature, as open sores on human society. But from learned people I had always expected a juster judgment; from them I had assumed that unreserved fairness, for lack of which, we are generally criticized. How greatly mistaken I was, to have credited each Christian author with as much honesty as he demands of others.

"In truth! How can someone who still possesses a sense of decency, have the temerity to deny a whole nation the probability of being able to produce one single honest man? From a nation, from which, as the author of *The Jews* puts it, all prophets and the greatest kings arose? Does his cruel verdict have any foundation? What a disgrace for the human race! No foundation? What a disgrace for him!

"Is it not enough that we must feel the bitterest hatred of the Christians in so many cruel ways; are these injustices against us to be justified by calumnies?

"We continue to be oppressed; in the midst of free and happy citizens we must live under continual restrictions, indeed we are, moreover, exposed to the mockery and contempt of all the world; only virtue, the sole comfort of oppressed souls, the sole refuge of the abandoned, let them not try to deny us completely.

"And yet if they do deny us this, what do the learned reviewers gain thereby? Their criticism nevertheless remains irresponsible. In fact, the

*The letter was written by Moses Mendelssohn (1729–86) to Dr. Aaron Emmerich Gumpertz who introduced Lessing and Mendelssohn to each other.

character of the traveling Jew (I am ashamed when I consider him from this aspect) should be what is wonderful, what is unexpected in the comedy. Should the character of an arrogant citizen who lets himself be turned into a Turkish prince, not be as improbable as a Jew who is magnanimous?* Let someone who knows nothing of the contempt for the Jewish nation attend a performance of this play; he will surely yawn for long periods during the whole play, although for us, it has very many beautiful parts. The beginning will lead him to observe sadly, how far national hatred can be pushed, and at the end he will have to laugh. These good people, he will think to himself, have finally made the great discovery that Jews are people too. So humanely does a spirit think, that is cleansed of prejudices.

"Not that I wish by this observation to devalue the Lessing play; not at all! It is known that the poet in general, and when he is working for the stage in particular, must conform solely to that opinion prevalent among the people. Accordingly, however, the unexpected character of the Jew must have a very moving effect on the audience. And in this much the whole Jewish nation is greatly obliged to him, that he takes pains to convince the world of a truth which is necessarily of great importance to it.

"Must not this review, this cruel damning of souls have come from the pen of a theologian? These people think they greatly aid the Christian religion when they proclaim all the people who are not Christians assassins and highwaymen. I am far from thinking so insultingly of the Christian religion; that would doubtless be the strongest proof against its verity, if, in order to establish it, one had to cast all humanity from one's sight.

"What of importance can we advance against our harsh judges who all too frequently seal their judgments with blood. Do not all their reproaches boil down to the insatiable avarice which they, perhaps through their own fault, exult to find among the common Jewish masses? Let us concede this to them; will it then therefore cease to be probable that a Jew should have saved the life of a Christian who had fallen into the hands of thieves? Or should he have done it, must he then necessarily let that noble pleasure, which comes from having fulfilled his duty in such an important matter, be spoiled with base rewards? Certainly not! Not when he has been placed in such circumstances as the Jew in the play.

"But how can it be unbelievable that among a whole people of such

*A reference to Molière's *Le bourgeois gentilhomme*.

principles and education, such a noble and sublime spirit should evolve, so to speak, on its own? What an insult! then is all our morality forfeit? then does no instinct for virtue stir within in us any longer? then Nature neglected us cruelly when it distributed that noblest gift to people, the natural love of goodness. How far above such cruelty you are, benevolent Father.

"Whoever knows you better, dearest friend, and knows how to appreciate your talents, can lack for no example of how easily happy spirits, without model or education, soar aloft, perfect their invaluable talents, better mind and heart, and can rise to the ranks of the greatest men. I point out to all that you, noble friend, would have taken on the role of the Jew in the play if, on your scholarly journey, you had been placed in his circumstances. Indeed I would humiliate our nation if I wished to continue to cite individual examples of noble spirits. Only yours I could not overlook, because it is so dazzling, and because I all too often admire it.

"In any case, certain human virtues are more common among Jews than most Christians. Consider the violent aversion they have for murder. It will not be possible to cite one example where a Jew (here I omit professional thieves) is supposed to have killed someone. How easy it is, however, for many an otherwise honest Christian to rob his neighbor of his life over a mere insult. They say that there is baseness among the Jews. Very well! if baseness spares human blood, then baseness is a virtue.

"How sympathetic they are to all people, how charitable to the poor of both nations. And how harsh does the conduct of most Christians towards their poor deserve to be called. It is true, they carry these two virtues almost too far. Their sympathy is all too sensitive and almost hinders justice, and their charity is almost wastefulness. But if only all those who indulged in excess indulged in good excesses.

"I could still add much about their industry, about their admirable moderation, the sanctity in their marriages. But their social virtues are already enough to refute the Göttingen *Journal;* and I pity him who could read such a general condemnation without shuddering. I am, etc."

* * *

I also have the answer to this letter in front of me. But I have second thoughts about printing it here. It is written with too much passion, and the retorts against the Christians are a little too energetic. You can certainly believe me, however, that both correspondents, even without wealth, have been able to achieve virtue and erudition, and I am

convinced that they would have more successors among their own people if the Christians would only allow them to hold their heads up a little higher.—

The remaining part of the Göttingen objections, wherein I am encouraged to write another, similar comedy, is far too flattering to me for me to be able to repeat it without vanity. It is certain that according to the plan offered there, a very engaging play could be made. Of course I must point out that then the Jews would be viewed only as an oppressed people, and not as Jews, and the goals that I had in finishing my play, would, for the most part, cease to exist.

Translated by Ingrid Walsøe-Engel